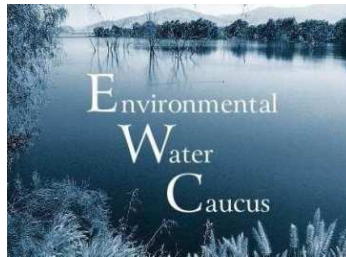


# Environmental Protections Letter to Agency Secretaries

April 4, 2014





CA Save Our Streams Council



Tuolumne River Trust



SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA COUNCIL



FEDERATION OF FLY FISHERS



food&waterwatch



April 4, 2014

Secretary Sally Jewell  
United States Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington DC 20240

Secretary John Laird  
California Natural Resources Agency  
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Secretary Penny Pritzker  
United States Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Secretary Matt Rodriquez  
California Environmental Protection Agency  
1001 I Street, P.O. Box 2815  
Sacramento, CA 95812-281

Subject: Environmental and Fishing Community Letter on Rollbacks of  
Environmental Protections

Dear Secretaries Jewell, Pritzker, Laird, and Rodriquez:

The undersigned organizations urge your agencies to end ongoing rollbacks of state and federal environmental protections for the Bay-Delta ecosystem. We also request that your agencies commit to specific actions now to improve future conditions for fish and wildlife, to compensate for the damage caused in recent weeks.

The current drought is causing hardships for urban areas, agriculture, fishermen and fish and wildlife. However, that hardship is caused by three years of dry conditions, not by environmental protections. As Mark Cowin, Director of the Department of Water Resources, said yesterday to the Stockton Record, “The great majority of water shortage this year is purely a basis of drought. It’s not regulation.”

Already, the Bay-Delta Estuary is home to six state and federally endangered fish species — in large part a result of the over allocation of limited freshwater during relatively good years. Already, biologists in some of your agencies have warned that conditions in the Bay-Delta and its tributary rivers are so poor that we may lose entire year classes of several distinct populations of salmon. Nevertheless, your agencies continue to approve rollbacks that fail to address these impacts or provide any reasonable biological justification. Further weakening of requirements would risk long-term and irreversible environmental damage.

Conditions have changed since the State Water Board approved its first waiver of

water quality rules for the State Water Project and Central Valley Project earlier this year. The latest snow survey reveals that conditions have improved significantly. DWR and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation have stated that public health and safety needs of water contractors are met. The current waivers are **not** providing improved carryover storage or other benefits for fish later in the year. Therefore, the previous justification for weakening regulatory requirements no longer applies.

Requirements protecting the Bay-Delta and listed species are already weaker in dry years than in other year types, and the continued decline of these species demonstrates clearly that the protections in place (some of which have been waived this year) are insufficient. The State Board has already begun proceedings to modify some standards for the Bay-Delta system, in recognition that existing protections are inadequate. In summary, there is no credible scientific or legal basis for continued rollbacks of regulatory requirements.

Species that live nowhere else on Earth could vanish forever as a direct result of state and federal mismanagement during the drought. In addition to impacts on natural resources, ongoing weakening of environmental protections could have human and economic costs as well, ranging from lost fishing jobs to degraded water quality with potential impacts on Delta drinking water and agricultural supplies. California's fishing fleet and fishing related tourism businesses will suffer for many years, if they survive at all.

The decisions your agencies have made and will make in the coming weeks and months will have other implications as well. Resolving the difficult long-term challenges we face in the Delta requires strict adherence to the best available science and trust that state and federal agencies will respect the needs of the environment even under political pressure. Ignoring scientific evidence of potential environmental impacts during the drought, due to the political demands of South of Delta agricultural interests, will make it far more difficult to reach an effective long-term solution in the Delta. The repercussion of these decisions will be felt for years to come.

We can and should take meaningful steps to help water users meet their needs this year by improving efficiency, recycling wastewater, improving groundwater management and more. But environmental laws are not the cause of water shortages, and waiving them is not the solution. The lesson taken from this drought should be recognition of the need to prepare for future droughts, not a decision to reward the lack of preparation in some sectors by forcing more

impacts on the environment.

Dry conditions are imposing hardships on all sectors of California's water community. We urge your agencies not to sacrifice the environment, the fishing industry and other interests by responding to pressure from a small group of special interests.

Copies:

Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr.  
Senator Barbara Boxer  
Senator Diane Feinstein  
Felicia Marcus, SWRCB

*The following environmental and fishing organizations support the comments and recommendations shown in the attached letter.*

*The corresponding logos are shown at the front of this document.*

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